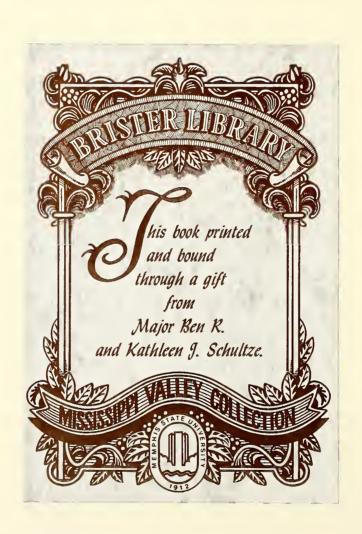
ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY INTERVIEW WITH FANNON BEAUCHAMP

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BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY." THE PLACE IS FLORENCE, ALABAMA. THE DATE IS JUNE 16, 1970, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. FANNON BEAUCHAMP, FORMERLY WITH THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE, AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MRS. SHARON HESSE.

DR. CRAWFORD:

Mr. Beauchamp, I suggest we start by getting some information in whatever way you want to sum it up about your early life, your education, and your background before you went with TVA.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, I left the University of Kansas in

1914 and entered the employ of the Westing-

house Electric Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where I remained three years, leaving the Westinghouse Company to go into the World War I. Leaving the army in the fall of 1919, I took a position as Chief Electrical Engineer for the Empire Gas and Fuel Company at Bartlesville, Oklahoma. I left them in 1923 to take a job as Assistant Superintendent and Chief Engineer of the Municipal Light and Water Department of Kansas City, Kansas, where I remained until about 1929. From 1929 till 1933, I did odd jobs for consulting engineers in the Kansas City vacinity, and in August or September of 1933, I took the position as Division Engineer for the Tennessee Valley Authority located at Wilson Dam, Alabama, a position I held until I retired February 1,



1958.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were your main duties in this work,

Mr. Beauchamp?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, in the Westinghouse Company it was

test floor work--working on test floors--

and then later in the Research Development Department, developing electrical apparatus. The World War I experience was in France as commanding officer of the 550th Engineers. The job with the Empire Gas and Fuel Company was confined mostly to electrification of oil wells, pumping stations and refinery work. The work as Assistant Superintendent of the Municipal Light and Water Department of Kansas City, Kansas, was strictly supervising the construction, operation and maintenance of electrical apparatus for the city.

Here at TVA I was in charge of a utility district comprising of fourteen counties is north Alabama. In the one-year period during which we were operating under a Federal court injunction, I added about ten counties in Tennessee, which I relinquished as soon as the Supreme Court dissolved an injunction.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see. What sort of court injunc-

tion was that, Mr. Beauchamp?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, that represented a three-year period

that it took to process litigation all the

way through from a District Court to the United States Supreme Court and during that period I was enjoined from doing any work in Alabama, so I maintained my residence here and carried on up in Tennessee.



DR. CRAWFORD: Who secured that injunction against you,

Mr. Beauchamp?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, the Alabama Power Company.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in a state court?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: That was in Federal Court.

DR. CRAWFORD: And the injunction was in effect for a

three-year period then?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Approximately a three-year period.

DR. CRAWFORD: When was that, sir? Was that before the

Ashwander Case?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: That was the Ashwander Case.

DR. CRAWFORD: But you continued operating in Tennessee?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: In Tennessee. And I was one of two divi-

sion engineers as they were called--so I

roamed a big area.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did your counties extend and your

utility district extend all the way across

northern Alabama, from Georgia to Mississippi?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Eventually, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: In what part of Tennessee did you work

while you were under the injunction in

Alabama?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Lincoln County with Fayetteville as the

County Seat, Giles County and Pulaski

as the County Seat, Bedford County with Murfreesboro as the County Seat.



Oh, let's see. And I secured a power contract for the municipality of Dixon, Tennessee, and Clarkesville, Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was your work received favorably in

Tennessee at the time you came to operate

here?

MR. BEAUCAHMP: Very much. Cooperation in Tennessee was

perfect--County agents, everybody, was just

100 percent. The reaction in Alabama was on the mixed side, but eventually the service area embraced about fourteen counties in north Alabama. I'm jumping around quite a bit.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you acquainted in this time with

A. P. Brazelton?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: A. P. who?

DR. CRAWFORD: Brazelton.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes. However, I never met him until about

twenty years ago. He was at that time lo-

cated in Jackson, Tennessee, and he has since moved to . . .

DR. CRAWFORD: Chattanooga. That's where he's living now.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: In Chattanooga?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, he was at Paducah.

DR. CRAWFORD: Paducah, I believe, for awhile.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: I didn't know he moved to Chattanooga.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. He is retired there.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: He retired?



DR. CRAWFORD: When were you able to return to Alabama?

Was that about '37?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: As near as I can remember, it was in April

of '36.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you generally have good relations with

the people in Alabama?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Oh, yes. I previously mentioned that our

reception in Alabama wasn't as good as

Tennessee.Consider that all the extension agents—county agents—operate out of Auburn. That's the land-grant college, and the power company had about half of the Board of Directors on the Board of Trustees of Auburn. And the county agents were under constant pressure from Auburn to let us alone, but there were only one or two of them that did. The rest of them jumped in and helped us all they could, and I feel the county agents paid a pretty high price for it too.

You see, in Tennessee there was Dr. Morgan, formerly Director of Extension, and he was a director and the sky was the limit. Anything that we wanted, we got in Tennessee, but the county agents in Alabama were operating, to some extent, on the Q.T., but they were doing their job.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did the county agents work with you

in Tennessee?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Oh, yes, they were just 100 percent. I

just mentioned that because these county

agents in Alabama were under sort of a restriction, because the Director of Extension in Alabama was acting under instructions from the Board of Trustees



of Auburn, but we got the job done.

DR. CRAWFORD:

Well, did this relationship between the

Board of Trustees of Auburn and Alabama

Power Company continue?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

Well, I have got to say it continued for

about six or seven years.

DR. CRAWFORD:

What else was the Alabama Power Company

able to do to interfere with your work?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

How were they?

DR. CRAWFORD:

Yes. What were spite lines?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

There were no spite lines built during the

injunction period. For what reason, I don't

know. But as soon as the injunction period was lifted, we started building lines for the co-ops. That was only in three or four counties until the REA was formed to finance those lines, and then after the REA was formed, why, we retired from the construction business and turned it all over to REA. We, of course, furnished power through our substation facilities, but these spite line activities only lasted two or possibly three years. They were rather undignified and amusing.

DR. CRAWFORD:

How were they arranged? Now, what was a

spite line, Mr. Beauchamp?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

Well, a spite line was a line that was

built on routes that were proved feasible for

construction by the co-ops. As soon as that information became available to the power companies, they immediately threw in construction crews that were



to build those lines. There were instances where there were lines being built on both sides of the same road.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did they hope to accomplish by that?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, I think that they hoped to discourage

any construction on the part of the co-ops.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were they effective?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: They were not effective. As a matter of

fact, I can't remember if one single line

was ever energized that they built.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they hope to persuade the people in

the counties to buy from them?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: I think that was their intention. But the

spite lines, to my way of thinking, were

a dismal failure. They accomplished nothing.

DR. CRAWFORD: In what period were they built?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: They were built in 1936 and '37 and possibly

some in '38, but there were none built dur-

ing that tiresome waiting period while that litigation was being processed.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you suppose that was because they expect-

ed to win?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: I presume so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was the Alabama Power Company the builder

of these spite lines?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, they built with their own personnel

and own equipment.



DR. CRAWFORD: Why had they not provided electricity to

these people before?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, that's a big question. In spite of

all that is said to the contrary, less

than 1 percent of the rural farms in the entire state of Alabama was receiving electricity as of, let's say, the middle of 1933--a fraction of 1 percent. Of course, taking the state as a whole, that figure is better

DR. CRAWFORD: Is it higher than that in the TVA area?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: It's at least that high or higher.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you persuade people to accept this

power? Did you work through co-operatives?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, the main difficulty was, of course,

financing. We weren't, by law, supposed

to be in the distribution business, however, we did build in three or four counties with our own funds.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did you do that?

than 95 percent.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, to get the ball to rolling, and after

it got rolling, why, the REA picked up and

carried on, but there was no persuasion necessary to get any of them to take power once it was available.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have trouble persuading them to

set up co-operatives?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: No. No, we didn't. I can't recall of any

difficulty along that line.



DR. CRAUFORD: Were people generally wanting power at

the time and had just not been able to

get it?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: They were desperate. As Louis Eckl pro-

bably told you today, he lived within three

miles of Wilson Dam and could hear the roar all night, and that little com-

munity never got power until TVA built out to them--three miles.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did the newspapers in the area usually sup-

port you?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, they did. They supported us over-

whelmingly.

DR. CRAWFORD: What people did you work with most closely

in the power program?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, almost entirely through the county

agents. They knew everybody in the county,

and they'll even go to the extent of presenting a full slate of the trustees

or proposed water directors.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a handicap then where they couldn't

help you, wasn't it?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you work in the counties where

you didn't have co-operation?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, it so happened that in the areas

where we had no cooperation were farther

away from Wilson Dam.



DR. CRAWFORD: Did you find this work different from any

you had done before?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, I did. It was entirely new, and I

relished it and enjoyed it very much.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any difficulty working with

the people in Alabama?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, not that I can recall.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you worked in Tennessee you kept

your residence here, didn't you?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: In what years did you have your greatest

success in the electrification?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: In Alabama, I would say, from '36 through

45.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did your work consist of mainly after

that?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, the administration of the fire con-

tracts took considerable time, and keeping

substations and supply facilities adequate was almost a continuous job of building and rebuilding and tearing down and rebuilding.

DR. CRAWFORD: How often generally did you have to re-

place substations?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, that's rather embarrassing. The load

grew so rapidly that by the time they were

finished, why, they were inadequate.



DR. CRAWFORD: You must have had a great deal of growth

in power use at that time.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: The growth was tremendous.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you set rates, or did you have a

part in setting the rates for this?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: I had nothing to do with the setting of

rates. That was set by the Board of Direc-

tors, and I just carried out the rates that were applicable.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you sell your power to co-operatives

and municipalities only? Did you make any

other sales?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, we did make some sales to large in-

dustries in the vicinity of Wilson Dam and

in the Huntsville area, and recently in the Decatur area. The thinking was that we could best serve those large industries because if anything would

happen to one of them it would be quite a disaster for some of these muni-

cipalities, and we could absorb a loss a whole lot better than they could.

That's never happened to this date.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there much growth of industry in north

Alabama during this time?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, there was.

DR. CRAWFORD: What part do you suppose TVA's power play-

ed in attracting this industry?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, I think it was a factor, but I don't

believe it was representative of all the



various factors that industry would have to evaluate in determining a location. But to some of the larger industries low cost power was quite a factor, like the aluminum industry. It was a major factor, and some of the chemical industries. But with medium and smaller sized industries, it wasn't a factor.

DR. CRAWFORD: How independent were you of Knoxville in

this? Did you make most of your own de-

cisions; did you have to consult with the people there?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, during the formative years I made a

lot of my own decisions because their or-

ganization was small and they were engaged in so many different things that one time I did my own construction work, my own buying. As soon as the Chattanooga office was organized, which wasn't until about 1935 or '36, all of the construction work was shifted to Chattanooga, and I got out of the construction work. However, it was up to me to determine load requirements to pass along to them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you travel often to Knoxville?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: In the early years, yes. I used to spend at

least one week out of every month but when

the Chattanooga office was set up, I minimized my trips to Knoxville and made my trips to Chattanooga.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was closer. The transportation was

very difficult then, wasn't it?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Motorcar, it was a good days trip from here

to Chattanooga. Trains were much more de-

pendable.



DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have to travel throughout the Ala-

bama counties very often?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, I had to keep one foot on the road

all the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you purchase your supplies and

equipment? Did you pick what you needed

yourself?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: In the early days, yes. We drew up our

own specifications and placed orders with

various jobbers and supply people. But as I said, beginning about 1935 I retired completely from the construction business, and they did their own

buying.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the need for power in this area dur-

ing World War II? Did it increase a great

deal?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, it did. It increased tremendously,

particularly in the Huntsville area and the

Wilson Dam area.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that because of new wartime industry?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: New industry.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened to your demands for power

after World Was II?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Well, it didn't drop off; it kept right

on going up?

DR. CRAWFORD: Did that surprise you?



MR. BEAUCHAMP:

It was very surprising.

DR. CRAWFORD:

And how were things during the 1950's?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

Well, just more of the same--just more

growth--although I've been away from TVA

since 1958. There's no dropping off of demand.

DR. CRAWFORD:

Did anyone forecast this? Was anyone ex-

pecting it to happen?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

Nobody that I know of expected it to happen.

I sat on a District Court bench down in

Birmingham for days and days listening to the arguments of the power company in the Ashwander Case, and there were experts from Boston and New York and Washington who presented bales of evidence to show that this area never would absorb the output of Wilson Dam, and here we are building Wheeler Dam and Norris Dam.

DR. CRAWFORD:

And the steam plants. Were the steam plants

under way? Were they constructed when you

left TVA?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

Yes. They were pretty much under construc-

tion. And here again it was just a battle

to keep up with the demand.

DR. CRAWFORD:

When were the decisions made to start the

steam plant building?

MR. BEAUCHAMP:

The first one was built during World War

II at Watts Bar, and then they came along

in just quick succession, and they're still coming along.



DR. CRAWFORD: Did the steam plants change your work any?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: No, they didn't, except that after an op-

eration we had charge of the transmission

and the distribution of power, but I never had any direct supervision over

generation. I never did. That was all handled by someone else.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you thinking about nuclear plants

when you left TVA?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: No. No, I wasn't. That was something

that came along shortly after I left.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did the administrators from Knoxville

come down to your office very often?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: No, outside of the legal department.

There were no Knoxville people that came a-

round. They were mostly all from Chattanooga.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did David Lilienthal come down to Muscle

Shoals often?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: He certainly did, and he was a welcome

sight.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you get to know him well in this time?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: Yes, I did, and I surely did admire him.

DR. CRAWFORD: He believed a great deal in the distri-

bution of electrical power and what it

could do for the area, didn't he?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: He certainly did, and just between us two,

why, that power program never would have



gained the importance that it did without his help. He was magic.

DR. CRAWFORD: He was able to speak to people well;

wasn't he a very good public speaker?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: He was an excellent speaker, and people

trusted him, and he was an able adminis-

trator. Well, the success of the entire venture rested on his shoulders.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you feel that this distribution of

power had made a great deal of difference

in the northern Alabama area?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: It certainly has.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know you have a great deal of industry now

that you didn't earlier. The standard of

living is higher. Do you have any other experiences with the TVA power program you'd like to get on the record, Mr. Beauchamp?

MR. BEAUCHAMP: I spent just a little over twenty-five years

with the TVA, and it certainly went mighty

fast.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'm sure you found it a very enjoyable

experience.

MR. BEAUCHAMP: It was very enjoyable because it was making

people happy and getting paid for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Beauchamp.





